

Testimony of State Representative Steve Wieckert

Assembly Bill 263 – Promoting Doctor's Services at Free Health Care Clinics *Assembly Committee on Public Health* *328 Northwest – May 23, 2007*

Good morning Chairman Hines and committee members. I am sorry that I am unable to testify in person before you today, but I thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 263, which will promote Doctor's services at free healthcare clinics in Wisconsin.

Healthcare is a challenge for many Wisconsin citizens, especially low-income individuals. Wisconsin has numerous free clinics around the state where these low-income individuals can go to receive some basic healthcare services. The free clinics provide an invaluable service to our communities, and numerous doctors around the state are willing to volunteer their time to work at them.

Currently, the Department of Health & Family Services (DHFS) has a program that allows certain medical professionals to be covered by the state for medical malpractice purposes. However, it is unclear under current law whether this protection is extended to doctors who have their own medical malpractice insurance. This puts active doctors at a disadvantage and acts as a disincentive for them to volunteer at free clinics.

In addition, I have personally been contacted by a number of doctors in Appleton, who have stopped, or are strongly considering not volunteering at free clinics in the area because of concerns over malpractice coverage.

This legislation makes it clear that doctors practicing at free medical clinics are serving as agents of the state and are granted state coverage regardless of whether the doctors have an active practice or are retired. This bill covers all volunteer healthcare providers including: doctors, dentists, registered nurses, optometrists, and physician assistants.

This bill will help insure there are enough medical professionals to provide healthcare to low-income individuals in Wisconsin. We should not allow bureaucratic red tape and ambiguities in the statutes prevent willing volunteers from providing medical assistance to those in need in Wisconsin.

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This initiative is supported by the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians, the Wisconsin Medical Society, and the Wisconsin Nurses Association.

Thank you for your consideration of this very important piece of legislation. Scott of my staff is now available to answer any specific questions the committee may have.

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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

1100 S. EAST ASIAN AVENUE

CHICAGO, ILL. 60607

TEL: 773-936-5000

FAX: 773-936-5001

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6117 Monona Drive • Suite 1 • Madison, Wisconsin 53716-3995 • (608) 221-0383 • FAX (608) 221-2788
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TO: Representative J.A. Hines, Chairperson and Members of the Assembly Public Health Committee
FROM: Gina Dennik-Champion, MSN, RN, MSHA
Executive Director, Wisconsin Nurses Association
DATE: May 23, 2007
RE: Support for AB 263 – State Agency Status Coverage Under the Volunteer Health Care Provider Program Regardless of Applicable Health Care Liability Insurance Coverage

Good morning Chairperson Hines and members of the Assembly Public Health Committee. My name is Gina Dennik-Champion. I am a Registered Nurse and the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Nurses Association (WNA). WNA is the professional organization for all RNs in Wisconsin. I want to thank you Chairperson Hines for holding a hearing on AB 263. I am here today to relay WNA's support of AB 263 – State Agency Status Coverage Under the Volunteer Health Care Provider Program Regardless of Applicable Health Care Liability Insurance Coverage.

WNA has two major public policy goals for this biennium. The first goal is to collectively and collaboratively advocate for access to comprehensive quality health care services for all people. By comprehensive, we mean focusing on prevention and health promotion, consumer health literacy, patient safety and coordinated health services including disease management. Our second goal is to assure that the RN is an essential provider in all practice settings including those settings where free or discounted health care is delivered.

According to the 2005 Executive Summary *Wisconsin Health Insurance Coverage*, published by the Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Public Health, Bureau of Health Information, 9.8 percent of Wisconsin's population was without health insurance. This 9.8 percent are the individuals that most likely benefit from the health services provided by physicians, advanced practice nurses and other RNs throughout Wisconsin's 48-plus "free clinics".

AB 263 is an important bill for those RNs volunteering their time and services as it removes the financial burden of needing to pay the additional malpractice premium for providing free care. I want to share that for the RN's providing these services AB 263 is welcomed and appreciated.

Although AB 263 results in cost savings by utilizing a more appropriate delivery setting versus emergency or urgent care, it in no way promotes a health care delivery system that is seamless and coordinated for the patient. WNA would like to state that AB 263 would not be necessary if we had a health care delivery system that provides coverage for all and is comprehensive, transparent, cost-effective, evidence-based and high quality. But I will share more of WNA's opinion regarding this for the right legislative hearing.

I want to thank you again Rep. Hines for holding a hearing and request support from the Public Health Committee members for AB 263. WNA also want to extend appreciation to Rep. Wickert for sponsoring AB 263 and to those members of the legislature who signed on as co-sponsors.

I will gladly answer any questions you may have.